

HISTORICAL FILE

Early History of Ashley National Forest

by Charles DeMoisy, Jr.

Ranger, 1910-17; Supervisor, 1921-25

The Ashley National Forest was created by Executive Order, July 1, 1908, from a portion of the Uintah Forest Reserve. This was the same year in which National Forest districts were set up in the west. The acreage involved in the transfer was 952,086 acres of which 4,596 acres were in Wyoming and the balance in Utah.

The North slope of the Uintah Mountains and the area north of Vernal had been withdrawn for forest purposes as early as February 22, 1897. When the Uintah Indian Reservation was opened in 1905, 1,010,000 acres of former reservation lands were added to the Uintah by proclamation of July 14, 1905. That portion lying East of the divide between Rock Creek and Lake Fork was included in the newly created Ashley Forest.

Some of the early forest officers of the Uinta were G.F. Bucher, Supervisor in 1901, and Dan Marshall, in 1902. They made their headquarters in Kamas. Dan Pack was assigned to the Hole-in-the-rock or Lone Tree District as ranger in 1901. His memoirs written up in 1951 for the Old Timers News gives a little information of conditions at that time. He states "about 10 days before I reached there, a sheep outfit pulled up over the cattlemen's deadline. A few days later 15 horsemen rode up to the sheep camp a little after dark, shot and clubbed to death about 500 sheep, shot the herder through the leg, piled up and set fire to the camp and rode away."

Apparently this deadline was partly on the forest, but not recognized as such by the Forest Service. However, there was no conflict in forest allotment lines and no further trouble occurred. In the early 1920's some of the cattlemen changed to sheep and the old deadline was pretty well forgotten. Pack says he was furloughed October 10, until the spring of 1902 when he went back to Hole-in -the-Rock and again rented pasture for his horses from Jim Phelps. He reports a forest fire started in Elk Park in September and burned out of control for about 10 days. Inspector Smith Riley showed up on this fire, he says. About October 10, 1902, Pack was transferred to Vernal, "with a boost in pay to \$75 per month." He mentioned marking timber for the Jim Griffin sawmill on Brush Creek Mountain. In March 1903, he was transferred to the Nebo Forest as Supervisor.

William M. Anderson was the Supervisor of the newly created Ashley National Forest. He had been a ranger at Duchesne and Vernal in 1905, and Deputy Supervisor on the Uinta. Other forest officers at the time of the creation of the new forest were Parley C. Madsen on the Lone Tree District, John D. Clyde on the Whiterocks District which included the Lake Fork Drainage, Grant Carpenter, A. A. Hardy and John S. Bennett stationed at Vernal. William R. Green, Jr. had been a Government trapper and ranger on the Manila District until he resigned in 1910 to file on a forest homestead. Green had taken 85 bear, he claimed, mostly in traps. He was later drowned while fording Green River in the spring of the year. His body was never recovered although his brother offered a reward of \$1,000.00 for anyone discovering it.

Tom Woolstenhuline went to the Duchesne District in the fall of 1906 and worked there until the winter of 1909-10. Later he went to the Stockmore District.

Charlie Barton, a temporary appointee and Fred O. Johnson followed him as ranger on the Duchesne District. The latter resigned December 31, 1923, (see article in November, 1959, Old Timers News).

In October, 1909, a 2-day ranger exam was held at Vernal. Thirteen took the examination of which the following four passed: Charles DeMoisy, Jr., and Seth Perry, assigned June 1, 1910, to the Manila and newly created Lake Fork Districts respectively; S. LeRoy Colton, to the LaSal Forest and Fred C. Johnson, later assigned to the Duchesne District on the Uinta.

Alameda Perry, sister of Ranger Perry, was the forest clerk, later succeeded by James E. Scott in late July 1910. He stayed until October, 1912. Sid Stewart and Duncan Lang were assigned to timber surveys on the forest during the year, 1910-12. Later, Lester Hitchcock and Charles F. Evans served as Forest Assistants, the latter working mostly on the Land Classification Reports with Ranger Hardy.

In December 1910, Clyde resigned and DeMoisy was transferred to the Whiterocks District in the spring of 1911.

In the late summer of 1910, most of the forest personnel were detailed to Northern Idaho forests to help in the control of the extensive fires occurring there in that year. The skeleton force left on the Ashley being out of communication with the situation, spent several days patrolling for fires. The skies were murky and they could smell the smoke, but could not locate its origin. Not until later was it learned that the smoke was drifting in from the Northwest and covering most of the Region.

The Supervisor's office was two room suite upstairs back of a building now replaced by the Bank of Vernal. The outer room or entrance was used largely for supplies and equipment including tools - not very inviting for visitors.

During the years 1908 to 1912 several pastures were fenced for rangers horses and 3 room frame or log cabins were built at Moon Lake, Dry Gulch, Farm Creek, Red Cloud on Dry Fork Mountain, Trout Creek, Lewis-Allen (now Greendale) and Hole-in-the-Rock. In 1910-11 a grounded circuit telephone line was built from Vernal over Taylor Mountain to Sheep Creek Park and Hole-in-the-Rock. in 1912, a branch line was constructed from Spring Creek to Moon Lake. In all of these improvements a lot of ranger labor was used. Not many structured improvements were made in the succeeding several years but a lot of trail work over the forest was done.

Several small sawmills were scattered over the forest in these early days. Besides the Griffin Mill on Brush Creek Mountain, already mentioned, there was one operated by Henry Ruple near the lower end of the McKee Draw. He used oxen for logging. Some of the Johnsons had a mill at trout creek; a man by the name of Gilman operated a mill on Dry Fork Mountain near the Red Cloud R. S., and Jim Johnson ran one on Mosby Mountain. He took in Henry Lee as a partner who later became sole owner. Ed. P. Balfour operated a mill on Dry Gulch for a group of Myton people and Jack and Tom Draper had a mill on Lake Fork. A little later, there was the McCune Mill on Yellowstone, the Timothy Mill in the Lodgepole on upper Dry Gulch and one on Pole Creek. All of these mills were cutting timber exclusively for local use. Settlers were allowed sales of green timber at cost or at a reduced rate to improve their own places.

Many took advantage of this regulation which made lots of applications and timber sales contracts to handle as well as marking and scaling of small lots at various places. Trees had to be marked for cutting and logs scaled before sawing which necessitated frequent trips by the ranger to the sawmills by trails or poor roads and required a large amount of the time of rangers disproportionate to the volume of timber involved. Some rangers

were obliged to set certain days or dates to be at certain places to receive applications and mark timber and to issue permits for free use of dead timber. This applied mostly to those districts adjacent to the newly opened Indian Reservation lands. Many of the homesteaders got out house logs and building materials for their first improvements under these provisions of the regulations.

During the winter months, as time permitted, a certain amount of checking was done in the settlements by rangers to see that the timber was used as contemplated, i.e., not sold or traded.

The Act of Congress of March 3, 1905, opening the Indian Reservation and adding 1,010,000 acres to the Uintah Forest Reserve provided that the "proceeds from any timber on such addition as may with safety be sold prior to June 30, 1920, shall be paid to said Indians." Accordingly every letter of transmittal to accompany payment for timber sold from said lands had to carry the endorsement, "to be deposited to the credit of the Uintah and Ouray Indian Tribes." Eventually rubber stamps for this endorsement were furnished rangers making sales from these lands.

Homesteaders on the former Reservation lands were required to pay \$1.25 per acre to the credit of the Indians when they proved up. In 1931, Congress got around to appropriating about 1/4 million dollars to pay the Indians for the approximately 1 million acres added to the forest reserve in 1905, "in satisfaction of all claims," was the language in the bill. Notwithstanding this language, the Uintah and Ouray Indian Tribes brought suit before the Court of Claims some years later representing that the \$1.25 per acre did not cover the value of the land. In a decision handed down in 1957, the Court of Claims fixed the value of the land in 1905 at \$1.25 per acre, but ruled that interest was due the Indians as a part of just compensation at 5% from 1905 to 1934 and at 4% thereafter, amounting to approximately 3 million dollars. A tract of 33,000 acres of coal land in the National Forest was the subject of a separate suit, the outcome of which is not known by the writer.

Forest homesteaders on June 11, claimed as they were called were filed shortly after the creation of the forest. They were mostly on Lake Fork, Yellowstone, Whiterocks Canyon, Lewis Allen (now Greendale) and Sheep Creek. A large number of applications were made for homesteading lands elsewhere over the forest, but had to be rejected upon examination and finding the land to be not chiefly valuable for agriculture. Mostly, these were for lands too high with too short a frost free period to produce grain and root crops necessary for the maintenance of a family unit. Quite a controversy developed over the F.S. classification of some of these lands. The contention was fanned by numerous articles in the Great Divide a subsidiary of the Denver Post. The editor, Volney T. Hoggart was an elderly gentlemen obsessed with the idea of getting settlers on the land. He maintained that there were hundreds of thousands of acres of treeless lands within the National Forests of Colorado and Utah suitable for homes for several thousand settlers. One area particularly referred to was McKee Draw on the Ashley Forest. The references became so frequent and so much publicized that it was proposed by the Forest Service that Mr. Hoggart personally inspect the area on-the-ground. Accordingly he came to Manila during the month of May. Accompanied by Regional Forester Kneipp and other forest officers and proceeded by wagon to a late spring snow storm. Mr. Hoggart said he did not care to go further, saying things had been misrepresented to him. The contention continued, however, until 1920 or thereabouts and appeals reached Senator Smoot, Congressman Colton and the Secretary of Agriculture, all finally approving the Forest Service classification.

In the fall of 1910, DeMoisy with the help of William and Sanford Green, gathered about 600 bushels of ponderosa pine cones in the Lewis Allen country by climbing trees lopping branches and robbing squirrel caches. Drying of the cones on seed sheets was carried on until the weather became too stormy. Then they were moved to a cabin and finally to Vernal before the last of the precious seed could be extracted. A year or

two later, Ranger Perry gathered about 400 bushels of ponderosa (then called Yellow Pine) cones on the Lake Fork District. Racks were built in the Moon Lake Ranger cabin for drying the cones with artificial heat and a wooden shaker was built for shaking out the seed. This operation was continued into January of 1912, I think it was.

A bushel of cones yielded about a pound of seed by these methods. All of the seed was shipped, I believe, to the Monument Nursery in Colorado. It was a time consuming activity but it helped to learn later that this was a very good lot of seed with a high percent of viability.

Most of the grazing allotments were set up while the Ashley Forest area was still administered as the Uinta Forest Reserve. Old Timers tell of how the sheep herds were rushed from place to place to reach favored parts of the range. In most cases, however, they followed certain trails to certain sections and built up a pattern of customary use prior to definite establishment of allotments by the Forest Service. Prior use was a main consideration in the allotment of grazing privileges by the Forest Service. The first sheep were taken into the higher country of the former Indian Reservation lands in the early 1900's under permit issued by the Indian Service or Department of Interior. Under the same permission authority, Preston Nutter grazed large numbers of cattle on Reservation Lands south of Duchesne. His prior use was not recognized here presumably because he was not a local settler and not so dependent as residents of the Uinta Basin.

Along the south boundary of the Reservation Lands added to the Forest was a strip reserved as Indian Grazing Land. Several Indians ran cattle here from Rock Creek to Whiterocks Canyon. There were few natural barriers to the drift of cattle from the Indian Grazing Lands to the Forest range. By arrangement between the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior Departments, the Indians were allowed to graze up to 1200 head of cattle and horses on Forest lands free of charge to cover this drift. At the time there were not many cattle under Forest permit to Whites, but as they began to raise more forage crops the demand for grazing by White settlers became more intense. At the same time, use of forest range by Indian cattle dropped off, the slack being taken up by permitted cattle. This eventually led to overstocking and obligations for more stock than the forest range would carry. The situation called for reduction of grazing privileges of both Whites and Indians which was and has been strongly resisted by the latter.

At one time the Indians had several bands of semi-wild horses running on these ranges. They were small and of little value and consumed range needed by domestic stock. They caused lots of trouble to White settlers, campers and stockmen whose horses would get away and into a wild bunch and be hard to get. These wild horses were finally rounded up by the Indian Department who gave a man by the name of Clark Elmer permission to capture them for what he might be able to get for them. Most of them went to hatcheries for fish food, but many of the Indians mourned the loss of their ponies.

Soon after opening the Indian Reservation, the need to increase water supplies for irrigation was felt by White settlers. The Indian allotments had prior filings for the natural flow of streams. The homesteaders began to develop reservoirs in the mountains for storage of water. Some of the first to be developed were Brown Duck Lake, Timothy Lake and Farmers Lake on the Lake Fork Drainage. At first they were inclined to take the easy way by merely lowering the channel to drain existing lakes. Forest officials maintained that this did not increase storage but in fact, lowered water tables and decreased late season stream flow. Finally, with the concurrence of the State Engineer filings were approved only when dams and additional storage were called for.

There were many predators and few big game animals on the Forest at the time of its creation and for a score of years after. Sheepmen allowed 10% as a normal loss by coyotes and bear frequently killed a few calf. I

remember seeing as many as 5 coyotes at one time on the lower sloped of Mosby Mountain. Wolves were a menace to livestock on the Duchesne District and the Cattle Association paid a special bounty of \$50.00 until they were finally eliminated. Deer were seldom seen and deer tracks were a novelty arousing interest. A small band of elk ran on the Manila District but never showed any increase. Some attributed this to inbreeding and thought new bulls should be introduced into the herd. More likely poaching and predators prevented any increase in the herd.

At that time, the Ute Indians believed in exercising their alledged treaty rights to hunt and fish as long as the "sun shines and the rivers run." This they did on former Reservation lands and elsewhere in and out of season without hindrance of law. In the fall of the year, large parties of Indians would go on hunting trips for up to a month. Later, by persuasion of the Indian Service officials and public opinion, they gave up such organized hunting. Through better law enforcement, reduction of predators, enactment of the buck law and curtailment of hunting by Indians in and out of season, the deer increased until by mid 1920's sizeable herds became established.

Henry Ruple, who logged with oxen at his sawmill in lower McKee Draw occasionally sent them to Vernal with a load of lumber. On one such trip, one of the oxen got down in the crossing on Brush Creek and drowned. In going to town on Saturday, I saw this animal lying dead in the stream. On my return from town on Monday, a hunting party of 25 or more Indians was camped at the crossing and having a feast and rare good time. They had hauled the dead ox out of the stream, skinned it and hung up the hide. They had cooked up a lot of the meat to eat on the spot and cut up the rest into strips to hang on the bushes to dry. They thus made sure of their meat before continuing over the mountain to hunt.

Most of the streams and lakes were well stocked with fish. Trout fishing was par excellence nearly everywhere, especially in the higher waters accessible by pack outfits only. Since there were few roads in the Forest passable to automobiles and local population was not large, these excellent fishing conditions extended to the 1930's when the more accessible waters began to succumb to heavy fishing pressure and more people had to use pack outfits to reach good fishing.

In 1915 or 16, Seth Perry resigned to file on a Forest homestead in Yellowstone as Clyde had done after his resignation in 1910. DeMoisy was transferred from the Whiterocks District to the Lake Fork District, as it was called then. He was succeeded by Vernon Bird on the Whiterocks District. The latter stayed only a short time and was followed by Albert Blood, who later took over the Lake Fork District when DeMoisy was transferred to Nevada in August, 1917.

In 1919, John Bennett resigned to develop his ranch on Sheep Creek, and Harry Van Tassell became ranger on the Vernal District. In May, 1921, Supervisor Anderson submitted his resignation and DeMoisy succeeded him as Supervisor. The latter stayed until 1925, when he was transferred to the Uinta and succeeded by A. G. Nord who became the third Supervisor of the Ashley.

George Walkup had become ranger on the Manila District in 1919. In 1923, he was transferred to the Whiterocks District, succeeding Thomas R. Perry who resigned. Clyde Lambert became ranger on the Lone Tree or Hole-in-the-Rock District in 1921. Later he was transferred to the Lake Fork District. Glen Lambert succeeded Walkup on the Manila District in 1923. Sidney Hanks was a ranger on the Lone Tree or Manila District for 2 or 3 years in the early 1920's.

Up until 1923 and 24, there were only wagon roads onto the forest. These led from the settlements to sawmills, ranger stations and stockmens camps. One rough road went thru McKee Draw to Greendale. The only other road across the forest was the old Government road from Carter, Wyoming via Hickerson and Sheep Creek Parks, Young Springs, Carter Dugway and Taylor Mountain to old Fort Thornburg in upper Ashley Valley. It was built by soldiers in the 1880's, was very rocky with lots of corduroy through wet places. At one time copper ore was hauled from the old Dyer Mine on Brush Creek Mountain to the Railroad over this road as witnessed by bits of the greenish ore found along the route.

In 1923, with the increase in motorized travel, the first efforts were made to make some of these roads passable to autos. Uintah County matched a Forest Service appropriation of 2 or 3 thousand dollars to improve the road onto Brush Creek Mountain mainly to reduce grades to not more than 15%. This might be said to be the beginning of the present Vernal-Manila Highway.

The same year or perhaps the next, Daggett County cooperated with the Service and about \$6,000 was provided for building an auto road from lower Sheep Creek onto the mountain. The Sheep Creek route was looked over carefully by DeMoisy, Hardy and O. W. Torgeson, and engineer from the R. O. While it provided the best grade and alignment, the cost was prohibitive for the funds available, so the route from the mouth of Spring Creek up the face of the mountain by switchbacks and up to 15% grades were selected. John S. Bennett who had resigned as a ranger in 1919 and was now located on the ranch in Sheep Creek took on the job as foreman of the construction. All work on this and the Brush Creek road was done with horses, plows and scrapers. No heavy equipment was available to the Forest Service and not much further road construction was done on the Forest until later, during CCC days.